FEMINISM IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI AND NAYANTARA SAHGAL

SYNOPSIS

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1 Introduction

'You educate a man, you educate a man.

You educate a woman, you educate a generation.'[1]

(Brigham Young)

Feminism is a multidisciplinary perspective to issues of equity and equality, which are based on gender expression, gender, gender identity, sex and sexuality. It is the faith in social, economic, and political equality of the genders. Feminism is about respecting women's knowledge, experiences, identities, powers, strengths and aiming to empower all women to grasp and realize their full strengths and full rights. It is admitting the fact that all genders irrespective of any discrimination have equal rights. It is not about hating or disliking men. It is not about women being superior to men. It is not about females being the best or superior. It is not about eschewing femininity. It is all about equality. It is simply understanding the fact that inequality effects both men and women and remember that both the genders suffer equally in this. True and honest equality leaves no one behind.

The concept of feminism is inseparably related to the works of literature. Many ancient writers and philosophers have talked about feminism in their works. From ancient Greece to the fight for women's sufferings to women's marches and the #MeTooMovement, the history of feminism is as long as it is enchanting. Plato in his classical *'Republic'* advocated that women possess "Natural Capacities'' equal to men for governing and defending ancient Greece.

Mary Wollstonecraft: in '*A Vindication Of The Rights Of Women' (1972)*, argued vigorously for greater equality for women.

Feminism is the belief in full social, political and economic equality for women. Although it originated in the west, but it is apparent and manifested throughout the world. It is represented by different organizations which are committed to activities on behalf of women's rights and interests.

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1. Brigham Young, Notebook/journal, Published (2021).

In the ancient times women were confined to four walls of a house and domestic life while as the public life was reserved only for men. In medieval Europe and India women were not allowed to own property, to study or to take part in public life. At the end of the 19th century India and many western countries like France, Germany women were still forced to cover their heads in public and even today in many parts of Germany, a husband still have the right to sell his wife. Even in 20th century, women could neither vote nor hold any elective office. Women were prevented from conducting business without a male counterpart be it a father, brother, husband or even son. Married women have no control over their children without the permission of their husbands. Moreover women have no access to education and were refrained from most professions. In some parts of India and world, such practices even continue today.

Feminist theory often focuses on analyzing gender inequality. The themes which are included and explored in feminism include discrimination, sexual objectification, oppression, women's suffrage and subjugation, mental depression, social inequality, disharmony in marital life, family, globalization, human rights, the self, sex work, sexuality , human trafficking, stereotyping and patriarchy.

Indian Feminism

Indian feminism is also a set of movements whose aim is defining, establishing and protecting equal political, social, and economic rights and opportunities for women in India. It is the achievement of women's rights within the society of India. Indian Feminists work for gender equality, the right to work for equal wages, the right to equal access to health, education and political rights.

Indian Feminism is divided into three phases. The first phase began in mid 19th century, when reformists started to speak in favor of women's rights by making achievements and reforms in education and customs involving women .It's main motive was to end the social evils of sati(widow immolation), to allow widow remarriage, to prohibit child marriage, and to lessen illiteracy.

The second wave began in 1960. Protests were held for women's equality not only for political rights but for family, sexuality and work. It was highly concerned with the issues of equality and to vanish all sorts of discrimination against women.

The third wave focused on fair treatment of women at home after marriage with not only the work force but right to political, social and economic equality. Despite the achievements made by Indian feminist movements, there are still innumerable issues of discrimination faced by women in modern India. Indian women face many barriers and obstacles in modern society. Several efforts have been made by Indian feminists to challenge the patriarchal structure of our society.

Sampat Pal Devi, who was a Government worker and had five children fought against domestic violence and domestic abuse within her own community and later on formed a group named as Gulabi Gang, who track down the abusers and beat them with the bamboo sticks until the abusers bow their heads and apologized.

In the area of religion, Indian feminists mostly compare Indian women to the strong and powerful female goddesses in Hinduism. Even the Vedas consider women in high respect and called them Dharma Patni (one who looks, preserves, conserves and promotes the rightful conduct of life).

The Quran simply states that both men and women are equal. The Quran totally prohibited the female infanticide (which was practiced in Pre Islamic Arab and other parts of the world) and instructs Muslims to educate their daughters as well as sons.

Indian feminist movement, as an initiative started independently in Maharashtra by raising voice over women's rights and women's education. Savitribai Phule started the girls first school in India in 1848. She played an important and vital role in improving women's rights in India. She worked to abolish the unfair treatment and discrimination of people based on caste and gender.

Tarabai Shinde, who is the writer of India's first text based on feminism *Stri Purush Tulana* (A comparison between men and women) in 1882. She protested against patriarchy and caste system in India. Ramabai Pandita also criticized caste system and patriarchy in Hinduism and married outside her caste. The effort and attempt which was made by Bengali

reformists abolished the culture and custom of child marriage, abolished Sati (where a widow used to threw herself on to her husband's funeral pyre), promote women's education, obtain legal rights for women, own property and obtain equal status in society.

Feminism is a buzzword that has been in lime light for quite some time. From TV channels to social media exchanges to casual conversation's the word feminism is used in various contexts. It is also misheard and misinterpreted. There is so much stain attached to this one word. Some people consider it is a war against men, some think women wanted to be placed above men in society but this is not true. Feminism is a simple concept that all humans irrespective of any discrimination are equal. Feminism simply means the belief of equality for all. Since the word feminism has word 'feminine' in it, a lot of people misunderstood it as a women's movement. But it is not a women's movement, it is a movement for all humans. It is simply understanding the fact that both men and women need to be treated at the same level socially, politically and culturally. The idea of feminism is to get rid of concepts like patriarchy, masculinity, dominance, superiority and sub ordination.

Feminism is supporting and empowering people. When the whole world will start accepting women for who they are and what they deserve that is when feminism will enjoy its real win.

In the proposed study I will work on the concept of feminism by two prominent Indian writers. The writers include the Sahitya Academi Award winners Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal. I have chosen these two writers because they belong to the list of talented and acclaimed women Indian English writers, who have not only talked about feminism, marriage, marital disharmony and status of women in their novels but have seen this shift and their elegance, fragility and insight have responded to it.

Desai born in 1937 in Mussoorie, India to a German immigrant mother, Toni Nime and a Bengali businessman, D .N. Mazumdar is one of the acknowledged and acclaimed Indian Writer. Her writings received international recognition and were widely accepted by the readers as well as critics. She got Sahitya Academi Award for her novel *'Fire on The Mountain'* in 1978. Besides her three other novels were shortlisted for Man Booker Prize. She depicted the lives of Indian women and their sufferings, trauma, depression, oppression and complicated relationship in her novels. Desai exposed the predicament of women in

modern India in her novels. Her novel *Cry, The Peacock* (1963) is considered as one of the first steps in the management of psychological fiction in Indian writing in English. The marital disharmony between Maya and Gautama and its consequences are discussed in her debut novel *Cry, The Peacock* (1963). *Fire on the Mountain (1977)* depicts isolation, desertion and sufferings of female protagonist.

Nayantara Sahgal: (born on 10 May 1927) is a member of the Nehru Gandhi family, the second of the three daughters born to Jawaharlal Nehru's sister, Vijay Lakshmi Pandit. She was born in Allahabad India to an orthodox Hindu family, but still she raised her voice against the oppression of women in Indian society.

She has written eight novels, two collections of memories and some non-fictional work. In her novels she talked about child marriage, female child murder and Purdha system. She also portrayed the actual condition and status of Indian women in her novels. She insisted that women should raise their voice against the male dominated society and break the barriers. She portrayed women as a powerful and strong personality. She created female characters like Rose and Simriti who had the strong will power, firm determination, dedication and the ability to live independently without any male counterpart or companion. Her novels deal with multiple themes ranging from personal issues and problems, ups and downs, joy and sorrows, fulfillment and frustrations of female characters to the political unrest which India has witnessed since independence.

Sahgal is one of the few Indian writers who work for Women Empowerment. She fights for women equality. She dedicates her life for Women Empowerment. According to Sahgal, she perceives that her important commitment is that of improving and upholding the liberation of women. Her Novel, *Rich Like Us (1985)* is a complex novel with multiple voices and enigmatic ending. She talks about patriarchal power and arbitrary power and displays how Rose faced so many problems and limitations in Indian society.

In *Storm in Chandigarh (1969)*, she talks about violence, sufferings, torture, trauma and marital issues along with the political and social unrest of women.

In the novels of both Desai and Sahgal, women are no longer goddesses, they are the people who move from darkness to enlightenment, from suffering to opportunity, from hesitation to boldness and from weakness to stand firm

2 Literature Review

A brief view of the existing literature provides the significant insights and approaches for understanding the concept of Feminism. Before proceeding further, it is right to take stock of available literature on the research problem. A plenty of literature is available on the concept of feminism. Some of the major works have been reviewed as under:

Adichie Ngozi, Chimamanda in here novel '*We Should All Be Feminists' (2014)* argues that being a feminism means acknowledging and understanding that sexism exists. She further mentions that feminism is all about the social, economic and political equality of the sexes. It does not mean women's rule over men as is often misinterpreted.

Anderson, G.D. Feminist, Everyday Fighter and Founder of the Cova Project (2019) said about Feminism that, 'Feminism is not about making women stronger, women are already strong, it is about changing the way the world perceives that strength.'

Bornstein, Kate's *'Gender Outlaw: on Men and Women and the Rest of Us'* (1994) is the creation of a women who has gone through large number of ups and downs –a former heterosexual male, a one-time scientologist and an IBM salesperson. She talks about sexism and shows how it is related to transphobia, homophobia, the media, relationships, surgeries and art (especially theatre). Gender Outlaw helps the readers to understand the cultural construct of gender roles.

Chopin, Kate in *'The Awakening'*(1899) laid stress on achieving freedom, social expectations, desire, women's rights and gender roles in male dominated society. According to her the idea of ownership is mandatory for everyone to explore the psychological complications of the human mind and structural complications of sexes in the society.

Deshpande, Shashi in '*The Binding Vine'* (1992) portrayed that women sacrifice their feelings, their emotions, their happiness, their comfort for the sake of society but also wants

to break out of that suffocating mould. She talks about grief, misery and courage which women face in society.'

Deshpande, Shashi in his book '*That Long Silence'* (1988) talks about man – woman relationship, martial discord, gender discrimination, search for identity, delineation of self, male hegemony, power, females sub-ordination and sexual politics.

Fuller, Margaret in *Nineteenth Century* (1845), advocates education as a means of emancipation for women. Her broad terms include: employment, education, and political rights for women. She totally opposes gender roles. According to her education is important for all. She believed that women had a right to get education and only education would help women to be more powerful and indepent.

Gay, Roxane in *'Bad Feminism'* (2014) describes the meaning of feminist movement. She emphasizes that this movement has become very complex in present time. The idea of feminism is getting blurred for those people who feel themselves as isolated or alienated by mainstream concepts like social equality, gender equality etc. She focuses on intersectional feminism that accounts for race and ethnic background She also focuses on entertainment that make people conscious about the negative concepts and perceptions of gender, race and sexual abuse. She utilizes television shows and films to discuss social ills and serious social issues that are prevailing in present society.

Hooks, Bell in *'Feminism is for Everybody: passionate politics'* (2000) argued that feminism which is making a world free of sexism is only possible if both the genders believe and fight for the feminist cause. She described feminism as, 'Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression.' She believes that in order the change the patriarchy as a system of domination, women need to change themselves first.

Iftikhar, Rukhsana in '*Indian Feminism: Class, Gender and Identity in Medieval ages' (2016)* talks about the miseries and suffering of Indian women with respect to their social class structure. In this book women of elite classes in the middle ages such as Razyia and Noor Jahan are discussed. Women were treated as private property in medieval India.

Kindersley, Dorling and McCann, Hannah in '*The Feminism Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained' (2019)* gives detail on women's organizations and movements in UK and

European Union. The definition of feminism in this book is inclusive. It is focused on the pursuit of the goal of gender equality by individuals, groups, projects and governmental programmes but it expands so as to encompass the wider goal of the advancement of women.

Investigated by **Madhumati, Adhikari,** 'In Desai's novels, the moral values of women are conveniently changed to suit the demands of man who treat them as their object; possession to be ruled and controlled by psychological insecurity nurtured in them through myths, customs and social discourses.'

May Atcott, Louisa's *'Little Women'* (1868) has influenced and encouraged large number of caring, loving, bold and unconventional women. She laid stress on the importance of family, and for the need of self-realization and self-sacrifice. According to her it is only self-sacrifice which brings the real joy, happiness and contentment in one's life. She emphasized that true sacrifice is rooted in love, respect, charity, compassion and selflessness.

According to **Pelosi, Nancy**. Everywhere women are the leaders. They occupy the most respectable positions in every field. From the CEO who runs a Fortune 500 company to the housewife, women lead everywhere. Even a strong country is made by strong women, So women should continue to break down the walls of stereotypes.

Reddy, Kirthig views on feminism, she strongly believes that education is the first and the most important weapon towards women empowerment. According to here only right education will ensure that women are more competent and confident in taking up bigger challenges and raising the bar in any field.

Showalter, Elaine in her essay '*Feminism Criticism in the Wilderness'* (1981) says 'A cultural theory acknowledges that there are important differences between women as writers, class, race, nationality and history are literary determinants as significant as gender.'

Steinem, Gloria. in the '*Revolution from Within: A Book of Self–Esteem'* (1993) celebrates the importance of Self –Esteem as a passport to personal renewal and as a best medicine against all social ills. She further said that, 'women are always saying, we can do anything that man can do. But man should be saying, we can do anything that women can do.'

According to her, ‘A Feminist is anyone who recognizes the equality and full humanity of women and men.’

According to **Schumer, Amy.** ‘I am a women with thought and questions and shit to say. I say if I am beautiful, I say if I am strong, you will not determine my story- I will.’

Thatcher, Margaret said about feminism, ‘if you want something said, ask a man, if you want something done, ask a women’. She modifies female success. She advocated that woman are equally strong, powerful and solid as man despite both having the different languages, traditions, gestures and different ways of being stylish and glamorous.

According to **Watson, Emma**. ‘The more I have spoken about feminism the more I have realized that fighting for women’s rights has too often become synonymous for certain, it is that this has to stop.’

Wollstonecraft, Mary in *‘A Vindication of the Rights of Women’* (1972) rejects the then established view that women are weaker or inferior to men. This happens only because of lack of knowledge and education. She advocates education for improvement of women’s condition. She believes that education is the only weapon which can instill love and respect among individuals and among social life.

Woolf, Virginia in *‘A Room of One’s Own’* (1929) encourages women to seek their financial freedom, intellectual freedom and material freedom which helps to them to pursue knowledge and creativity. According to her, ‘Intellectual freedom depends on material things. Poetry depends on intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but since the beginning of time.’

She further explains that if women are not given equal rights with men in terms of career opportunities, property ownership, material wealth, educational opportunities, childcare ownership, they would not be able to make progress. So it is very important that women should be given equal rights and equal opportunities in all fields as that of men.

Yousafzai, Malala in, *‘I Am Malala’: The Girl who Stood Up for Education and was shot by the Taliban’* (2013) talked about the women’s rights. She once revealed in a conversation with actor Emma Watson, that initially she saw feminism as a ‘tricky word’. But later on she

described herself as a feminist. During a session at The World Economic Forum she told the audience that, 'I just looked more into it and I realized that feminism is just another word for equality, it means equality and no one would object equality, no one should object equality and it just means that women should have equal rights as men.'

3 Research Gap Identification

With reference to the above review of the literature, it is found that much research has been done on feminism. But it is found that Feminist research is not only about glancing at the holes and gaps where women's aspect, attitude and view point were ignored: but it is genuinely driven by contemporary issues which women are facing even today. Research is required on the sexual harassment, domestic violence, sexual and reproductive rights, Social inequality, marital disharmony and honor crimes.

4 Objectives

Feminist research is characterized by its double aspects. It embraces both the building of new knowledge and the production of social change. Feminism changed the lives of countless women and build new worlds of possibility for education and empowerment, working women, feminist art and feminist theory for some people. The aim of the feminist moment is simple: let women have freedom, equal opportunity and control over their lives.

But despite all this there are countless problems which women are facing in current time. In my thesis, I will analyze select works of two major Indian English writers. Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal - who explored the concept of feminism , marital relationships and status of women as the prominent themes in their Novels,

The objectives of my study will include-:

1. To analyze the position of women in the novels of Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal.
2. To compare the major women characters in the novels of Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal.
3. To study the causes a marital disharmony and women's subjugation.
4. To study the difference between gender equality, gender equity and women's empowerment.

5. To highlight the fact that the solution to the problems faced by a women in the modern society is empowerment and education.

5 Purpose of the research work

Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal are two acclaimed novelists and great personalities who have focused on the feminism, disempowered women, marriage, education and other socio-political aspects of community in their novels. The main cause of the study is to discover the feminist approach in the novels of Anita Desai and Nayanatara Sahgal in particular and other feminist writings in general.

The research will point out the social and cultural factors that influence the women in her struggle against the social ills like violence, sufferings, depression and disharmony in marital life in male dominated society as represented in the novels under study. It analysis various steps that direct a women to recite her voyage towards self –awareness. The research explores the women who is independent, self determined, strong, who is a feminist but not anti-male. Her passion is to break the rules of oppression, subjugation, subordination and patriarchy. The novels of Desai and Sahgal are full of curiosity, confusion and emotional treatment of the Indian women.

6 Research Methodology

The present research work is depended upon the primary sources as well as secondary sources. Primary sources include the original works of Desai and Sahgal which are read, analyzed and interpreted critically. The primary sources include: Anita Desai's- *Cry, The Peacock and Fire On the Mountain and* Nayantara Sahgal's, - *Rich Like Us and Storm in Chandigarh.* The basic concepts of feminism, alienation, patriarchal society, women's subjugation and sufferings in male dominated society will be fully explained and explored. Research will also analyze books on socio-economic conditions of women and books that show how men and women are different. To justify the research work, I will contrast and compare feminism and status of women in the works of selected authors as well as its depiction in the works of some other authors too.

7 Chapterisation

Research will be completed in five chapters.

Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter will deal with the introduction and the historical background of feminism with special reference to Indian feminism.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Status of Women in the novels of Anita Desai: this chapter will study the literature review and significant framework of status of women in Desai's novels C*ry, The Peacock and Fire on the Mountain.*

Chapter 3 Materials and Methods

Socio- Political concerns in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal: this chapter will describe the research method choosen to frame the study. It will include both primary as well as secondary assessments. Research will also illustrate the socio-political concerns in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal *Rich Like Us and Storm in Chandigrah.* These novels deal with the violence and emotional communion which women suffer.

Chapter 4 Results and Discussion

Marital Disharmony in the novels of Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal: this chapter will cover the results and analyze the discussion of the research. It will also analyze the causes of marital disharmony as portrayed in the works of Desai's C*ry, The Peacock and Fire on the Mountain* and Sahgal's *Rich Like Us and Storm in Chandigrah.*

Chapter 5 Summary and Conclusion

This will be the concluding chapter where research will analyze the findings of research work and try to show that how women have gained voice and respect against social ills and issues. This chapter will be in the form of summary and conclusion based on present study. It will also contain the recommendation and suggestion of the study.

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CERTIFICATE
(SYNOPSIS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE)

This is to certify that the Synopsis/Revised Synopsis for Ph.D. Thesis titled, **"FEMINISM IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI AND NAYANTARA SAHGAL "**, submitted by **Ms. Neelofar Mohammad** to the Career Point University, Hamirpur (H.P.), India in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY** in the Division of Language, Art and Culture, Department of Law, Humanity and Arts, School of Legal Studies and Governance has been approved by the Research Advisory Committee (RAC) after an Oral Examination of the student on dated ..20... April 2022.

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